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Report of the Secretary-General on developments in Guinea-Bissau and on the activities of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in that country

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 14 of Security Council resolution 1233 (1999), by which the Council requested me to keep it regularly informed and to submit a report on developments in Guinea-Bissau and on the activities of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS). Subsequently, in paragraph 11 of its resolution 1580 (2004), the Council requested me to submit a written report to it every three months.

2. The present report covers developments in the country since my previous report (S/2008/181), dated 17 March 2008; in particular, it provides details, including on progress and constraints, regarding the political, security, socio-economic and human rights situations there.

II. Political developments

3. The period under review was marked by political and institutional tensions between the President, João Bernardo Vieira, and the National People's Assembly. The tensions stemmed from the controversy generated over the mandate of the National Assembly, which was expected to end on 21 April 2008. Article 79 of the national Constitution provides for a four-year mandate for the National Assembly, beginning on the date of the announcement of the results of the legislative elections, while the electoral law sets the dates for elections between 23 October and 25 November of the year when the legislature ends. If elections are held between 23 October and 25 November following the end of the mandate of the National Assembly on 21 April 2008, there would be an institutional vacuum of more than six months between the end of the mandate and the holding of the elections.

4. In an address before the National Assembly on 25 March 2008, President Vieira, stated, inter alia, that the mandate of the 2004-2008 legislature would end on 21 April 2008 in accordance with the Constitution of Guinea-Bissau. On the same day, a presidential decree was promulgated announcing that legislative elections would be held on 16 November 2008. In reaction, the National Assembly convened for an urgent debate on 27 March 2008, at the request of the Social Renewal Party,

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and adopted resolution 03/PL/2008 by 65 votes to 2, with 3 abstentions, to extend the mandate of the National Assembly until the announcement of the results of the forthcoming legislative elections.

5. During the debate, supporters of the resolution invoked an internal regulation of the National Assembly which stipulates that the mandate of parliamentarians commences with the first session after the elections and ends after the announcement of the results of the following elections. Those opposed to the resolution considered its adoption unconstitutional and sought the legal opinion of the Supreme Court of Justice. Its legality was further questioned by President Vieira and other national political actors who deemed it irregular, as it was passed without the mandatory two-thirds majority and was to come into immediate effect without the President's assent, thus usurping his constitutional powers of promulgation. Subsequently, on 14 April, a group of parliamentarians submitted a request to the Supreme Court for an advisory legal opinion on the constitutionality of the resolution.

6. In the wake of the adoption of the resolution, President Vieira held separate consultations with members of parliamentary political parties, including the Prime Minister and the Speaker of the National Assembly, followed, on 15 April, by a meeting of the Council of State, aimed at seeking a consensual solution.

7. On 16 April, at an extraordinary session of the National Assembly, the members adopted exceptional transitional constitutional bill No. 1/2008 to extend the mandate of the National Assembly beyond 21 April 2008 until the announcement of the results of the next legislative elections, with the provision that it would immediately come into effect on the date of its promulgation. The bill was passed by 68 votes to 7, with 6 abstentions. Following a tense political standoff between the President and the National Assembly, the bill was subsequently promulgated by the President on 18 April. A political and institutional crisis was temporarily averted, but concerns continued to be expressed by opposition political parties and members of civil society, who believed that the President had signed the bill under pressure from the military. They decried continued interference in politics by the armed forces. On 28 April, parliamentarians submitted a request to the Supreme Court for an advisory opinion on the exceptional transitional constitutional bill. On 17 May, the Supreme Court confirmed that legal consultations on the matter were taking place with, among others, the Prosecutor General and the Speaker of the National Assembly.

8. Also on 18 April, the President signed the amnesty bill, exempting all those involved in political-military crimes before October 2004 from legal prosecution, while also restoring the political and civil rights of those who lost them as a consequence of past crises. In addition, the bill formalizes the creation of the National Reconciliation Commission, which, among its other functions, will provide monetary compensation to those who incurred injuries or material losses as a result of past political-military conflicts. Furthermore, the law takes into account the memorandum of understanding of 10 October 2004 and resolution 12/ANP/2004 of the National Assembly, as well as Security Council resolution 1580 (2004), by which the Council called on the authorities to take into consideration issues of justice and impunity.

9. Following the announcement of the date of legislative elections by President Vieira and the presentation by the Government of the electoral budget on 31 March

2008, the mobilization of financial resources became a major challenge. In addition to the operational electoral costs, the budget covers approximately $4 million in Government sovereignty costs, consisting of $1,513,035 in arrears owed from past elections, $1,815,185 for the salaries of electoral staff and $500,000 for voter registration in the diaspora. On 29 April 2008, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the European Commission signed a convention relating to the European Union's contribution of €600,000 towards the financing of the 2008 legislative elections. Those funds were the first contribution from donors to the basket trust fund managed by UNDP, which has itself contributed $600,000. The Government has also contributed the equivalent of $356,000 for the payment of the most urgent arrears resulting from past elections. Portugal has guaranteed in kind contributions to cover the costs of voter registration and voting. On 5 June, the President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Mohammed Ibn Chambas, informed my Representative that ECOWAS will contribute $500,000 for the elections. In April, I approved a financial package from the Peacebuilding Fund for four quick-impact projects, including a project on electoral support to cover voter registration and civic education in the amount of $1,381,889. The resources mobilized thus far total $3,297,889, leaving a budget gap of $5,266,209.

10. Following the decision of the Government to use biometric voter registration in the legislative election of 2008, UNDP presented a revised electoral budget of $15,605,668, significantly higher than the original budget of $8,564,098 for the elections. Subsequently, on 19 May 2008, UNDP convened a meeting of key Guinea-Bissau donors to discuss electoral support, in particular the option for biometric voter registration, which proved to be too expensive. On 20 May, my Representative, together with the UNDP Resident Representative and the European Community representative, met with the Prime Minister, Martinho N'Dafa Cabi, to advise him that, in view of the financial and time constraints, the option to use biometric registration was no longer feasible if the election date of 16 November 2008 announced by President Vieira was to be maintained. On 5 June, the Prime Minister explained at a press conference that the Government had reviewed its initial decision to use biometric technology for voter registration and would opt for the use of manual voter registration in the 2008 elections. He expressed the hope that preparations for biometric voter registration for the presidential elections in 2010 could start as early as January 2009. In June 2008, UNDP will deploy in the country a team of electoral advisers on electoral management, civic education and logistics, in order to support national electoral structures.

11. From March to May 2008, the participatory dialogue programme led by the National Institute for Studies and Research and Interpeace — Voz di Paz/Voice of Peace — proceeded with its research on the root causes of socio-political instability in the country through grass-roots consultations in 18 constituencies. The programme continued its collaborative efforts with community-based economic associations, non-governmental organizations and community radio stations with a view to strengthening platforms for dialogue in all regions of the country. Recurrent themes during local discussions were the increasing insecurity and violence resulting from the arbitrariness or non-existence of local State structures; bad governance, which has eroded trust in State institutions; the ill-functioning justice system and the application of traditional forms of justice, which is often not in accordance with international norms; increased poverty among large sectors of the

population due to the mismanagement of natural resources; and the intensification of local conflicts as a result of unemployment and widespread poverty.

12. During the period under review, UNOGBIS produced 13 radio programmes focused on reconciliation, gender issues, elections and the combating of drug trafficking. In June 2008, a series of radio programmes was broadcast focusing on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and the participation of women in the electoral process.

13. From 16 to 18 May 2008, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Haile Menkerios visited Guinea-Bissau as part of a working mission to West Africa. He met with the President, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the President of the National Electoral Commission, the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces and representatives of the United Nations system. Discussions and consultations focused on ongoing efforts by the Government and its partners to consolidate peace and stability, including preparations for the forthcoming legislative elections, the engagement of the Peacebuilding Commission in Guinea-Bissau, the reform of the security and defence sector and the fight against drug trafficking and organized crime. The Assistant Secretary-General acknowledged the challenges confronting the Government and its partners, particularly the need to strengthen the capacity of State democratic institutions; the urgency of addressing food insecurity and other socio-economic needs of the population; and the creation of an enabling atmosphere and proper conditions for the holding of credible and transparent legislative elections in November 2008. He pledged to support the advocacy efforts of the United Nations and partners in Guinea-Bissau with a view to helping the country sustain ongoing stabilization efforts, stressing that the holistic approach inherent in the engagement of the Peacebuilding Commission will also provide an extra platform for resource mobilization for the country.

III. Activities of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Fund

14. Throughout April and May 2008, UNOGBIS, in collaboration with the Peacebuilding Support Office, continued to provide support for the work of the Peacebuilding Commission. The Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations and Chairperson of the country-specific configuration on Guinea-Bissau, Maria Viotti, headed a delegation of the Peacebuilding Commission which visited Guinea-Bissau from 6 to 11 April. The main purpose of the visit was to hold consultations with all relevant stakeholders, including the Government and national and international partners, as well as with civil society and the private sector, on the strategic framework for peacebuilding in Guinea-Bissau. The delegation also visited ongoing peacebuilding projects throughout the country.

15. On 7 May, the country-specific configuration on Guinea-Bissau of the Peacebuilding Commission initiated a round of thematic discussions on key peacebuilding priorities, including elections; public administration reform and measures to reactivate the economy; the combating of drug trafficking; the strengthening of the justice sector; socio-economic challenges, including youth employment and energy; and security sector reform and the rule of law. Representatives of the Government, civil society, including women's groups and the private sector, the United Nations system in Guinea-Bissau and other partners, are

participating in these discussions by video link. It is envisaged that these thematic discussions will inform the drafting, by the Government of Guinea-Bissau in consultation with all relevant stakeholders, of the country's strategic framework for peacebuilding, which is expected to be finalized and adopted towards the end of July 2008.

16. Early in April 2008, the Guinea-Bissau interim priority plan was approved. In addition, I approved an allocation of $6 million from the Peacebuilding Fund for the implementation of four short-term project proposals in the areas of the security sector, youth employment and the forthcoming legislative elections. The recently established national steering committee met late in April to approve its terms of reference and rules of procedure and again on 29 May to approve four project proposals prepared and submitted by the Government through United Nations agencies and their national counterparts. Upon the completion of the strategic framework plan in July 2008, and in line with identified priorities, I will announce the second envelope of assistance to Guinea-Bissau from the Peacebuilding Fund.

IV. Security aspects

17. On 13 April 2008, the headquarters of the judicial police in Bissau was attacked and vandalized by approximately 20 agents of the public order police. In the course of the attack, 21 prison inmates were set free and 1 judicial police officer, in custody for the killing of a public order police officer, was led away and killed, and his body put on public display. On 14 April, during a press conference on the matter, the Prime Minister and the Ministers of Justice and of the Interior condemned the incident and announced the creation of a commission of inquiry to fully investigate the circumstances and to hold those responsible accountable. The headquarters of the judicial police was sealed and placed under the protection of the military police.

18. My Representative met subsequently, on various occasions, with the authorities, including the Prime Minister, the Ministers of Justice and of the Interior, the Prosecutor General and the Director General of the judicial police to ensure that the incident did not trigger further crises and to promote a quick resolution of the situation, in part to prevent compromising the anti-narcotics operations of the judicial police. The Prosecutor General has initiated the work of the commission of inquiry, although he has deplored the lack of cooperation from some districts.

19. On 5 May, the International Contact Group on Guinea-Bissau met in Praia. The Group condemned the recent clashes between the security forces in the country and called on the Government to put in place strong law enforcement mechanisms to fight impunity, and to consider available international instruments in this regard. The Group also agreed to establish a local contact group comprising its representatives in Bissau, under the co-presidency of Portugal and ECOWAS. The local group will ensure continuity of the Group's activities and its periodic working sessions by maintaining a permanent dialogue with the Government and other local actors.

20. During the reporting period, projects were formulated, together with technical assistance inputs, to implement the commitments made by the international community at the International Conference on Drug Trafficking in Guinea-Bissau, held in Lisbon in December 2007. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime,

the European Commission and the Government of Guinea-Bissau have finalized a contract to allow the disbursement of the €2 million contributed in Lisbon by the Commission. The national managing structures for the oversight and implementation of the Government's anti-narcotics operational plan were inaugurated by the Government on 8 May 2008. The structures provide for two operational steering bodies responsible for the running of the law enforcement and criminal justice projects, and a consultative board comprising relevant national ministries and international partners.

21. A Special Adviser on anti-narcotics and organized crime of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime assumed his duties in Bissau in May, completing the initial set-up of a dedicated presence of the Office in Guinea-Bissau. The presence of the Office in Bissau is crucial for speeding up delivery of technical assistance inputs to the judicial police and the quick implementation of projects by the Office and the Ministry of Justice, in accordance with the Government's anti-narcotics operational plan.

22. On 22 May 2008, my Representative convened a meeting of international partners to review resource mobilization efforts following the Lisbon Conference. The discussions centred on the establishment of mechanisms by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime for the pooling and disbursement of donor assistance for the implementation of the Government's anti-narcotics operational plan, as well as linkages to the planned ECOWAS regional conference on drug trafficking in West Africa. On 23 May, the first meeting of the national committee for the implementation of the anti-narcotics operational plan was held in the Ministry of Justice to review current efforts in combating drug trafficking and organized crime.

23. On 21 April 2008, the Office of the Prosecutor General summoned the Prime Minister for a hearing related to his recent public claim that he was aware of the involvement of several people in drug trafficking activities in the country. On 14 May, the Deputy Prosecutor General interviewed the Prime Minister, who is also the Chairman of the committee to combat drug trafficking.

V. Military aspects

24. In mid-April 2008, the Government released the results of the UNDP-financed census of the armed forces, which was carried out between 2 and 20 March 2008. At the end of the exercise, identity cards were issued to all 4,458 active personnel in the armed forces, of whom 95.8 per cent are men and 4.2 per cent are women. The security sector reform programme envisages a reduction of the size of the armed forces to 3,440 personnel. Senior and middle-level officers total 2,473 (55.4 per cent), while personnel in lower-level categories, including corporals and soldiers, total 1,985 (44.6 per cent). This inverted-pyramid structure of the armed forces exerts enormous pressure on the Government's military staff payroll and emphasizes the urgent need to conduct a census of all other defence and security forces with a view to adequately planning for demobilization and reintegration of both defence and security forces.

25. The census of the armed forces was considered a prerequisite for the effective engagement of the donor community in support of the national strategy for the reform of the defence and security sector. In the meantime, the security sector reform technical coordination committee has initiated preparations, with financial

assistance from the European Union, for the census, scheduled to take place in June 2008, of veterans of the liberation war.

26. Between January and April 2008, a total area of 2,719,502 m^2 was cleared of 45 anti-personnel, 152 anti-tank and 6 anti-boat mines, as well as 348 items of unexploded ordnance and 78 detonators, by the non-governmental organizations Humanitarian Aid (HUMAID) and Lutamos Todos Contra as Minas. From 30 March to 4 April, UNOGBIS organized training sessions in the use of force and firearms, the code of conduct and ethics, human rights principles in law enforcement and the rights of women and children. The participants included 59 police agents, among them 5 women, from the public order police, migration and State security branches. The training sessions were held in Bolama and Buma, in the south of the country. From 26 to 30 May, an additional 25 police officers from the judicial police were trained in the use of force and firearms. In June, approximately 50 police agents from the customs and border police received training on the issues of clandestine migration and drug trafficking.

27. On 14 April 2008, a joint European Union civilian and military team of security and defence experts arrived in Guinea-Bissau to prepare the logistical and technical conditions for the deployment of 15 European Union civilian and military personnel in the country. The deployed personnel will provide technical assistance in the area of security sector reform to the security and defence services of Guinea-Bissau, including for the revision and drafting of relevant legislation and the strengthening of existing judicial mechanisms. This assistance is being given under the framework of the European Security and Defence Policy, with a budget of €5.6 million over a period of 12 months. The European Commission has earmarked an additional €27 million for conflict prevention under the tenth European Development Fund, which puts the European Commission in the lead in terms of financial and technical support for the security sector reform programme in Guinea-Bissau.

28. The UNDP Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery assisted the United Nations country team in Guinea-Bissau in preparing a justice and security sector reform project for the Government, with financial assistance valued at $7,980,488. The project is aimed at increasing access to justice for vulnerable groups, particularly women; strengthening national capacities; and preventing, as well as mitigating, the impact of violent conflict through the strengthening of the justice sector in Guinea-Bissau. Thus far, $2,187,900 has been secured as a result of combined contributions from Germany and UNDP, with $5,792,588 still to be mobilized.

29. From 14 to 16 April 2008, a delegation from the ECOWAS Committee of Chiefs of Defence Staff, comprising the Chiefs of Defence Staff of Nigeria and Burkina Faso, undertook a fact-finding mission to Guinea-Bissau. The main objective of the mission was to ascertain the state of military barracks and the living conditions of military personnel, and to meet with national authorities to discuss the political and socio-economic situation in the country and the status of the ongoing defence and security sector reform effort. At the end of the visit, the delegation called on ECOWAS and the United Nations to scale up their mobilization of donor support for the implementation of the development programmes and projects in Guinea-Bissau to benefit civilian and military segments of the population. They also called on the international community to work together with the authorities of

Guinea-Bissau in the implementation of the security sector reform programme, particularly the smooth reintegration into civilian life of ex-combatants.

30. Government and international partners acknowledge that meeting the challenge of mobilizing resources for the successful implementation of security sector reform in Guinea-Bissau will require the enhanced coordination of donor assistance so as to avoid duplication and facilitate the creation of synergies and complementarities among partners. As part of the efforts to help address that challenge, a resource-mapping exercise on current and planned donor support for security sector reform in Guinea-Bissau was organized in New York on 22 and 23 May 2008 by the Department of Political Affairs and UNOGBIS, with the support of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Peacebuilding Support Office. Participants included United Nations agencies and departments in New York as well as representatives of Governments, the World Bank, the European Union, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the African Union and ECOWAS. Participants from the regional offices in Dakar of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the United Nations Office for Project Services and representatives of Guinea-Bissau took part in the meeting by video link. Discussions highlighted the need to further support the Government financially, materially and technically and to fill gaps in the areas of law enforcement and criminal justice. An assessment mission to Guinea-Bissau is expected to be undertaken later in 2008 in order to identify priority areas for additional donor contributions to the security sector reform programme.

VI. Economic and social aspects

31. During the period under review the country registered an improvement in some of its economic indicators. Economic activities have increased, owing to higher agricultural production and greater activity in the construction sector. The economic prospects for 2008 indicate a 3 per cent growth rate in gross domestic product and a 7 per cent inflation rate, down from 9.3 per cent in 2007. To date, 25,000 tons of cashew nuts have been exported, with the total volume of exports of cashew nuts for this year expected to be 106,000 tons, compared with 96,100 in 2007 and 93,300 in 2006. The Government's financial needs for 2008 are expected to be as much as $115.8 million. Although there has been a relative increase in revenue, public expenditure is higher than predicted. After the deduction of all revenues and financial contributions from donors, the budgetary gap is estimated to be $12 million. The combined budgetary support granted by donors thus far is approximately $60.7 million.

32. The overall fiscal situation of Guinea-Bissau remains fragile owing to the rising prices of fuel and food. The Government has introduced a number of preventive measures, such as tax exemptions on imported rice — a staple food item for most inhabitants — and fuel, in order to mitigate the negative impact of price increases on ordinary people, but this will mean a drop in projected State revenue from taxes.

33. Between 8 and 22 May 2008, a mission from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) undertook an assessment visit to Guinea-Bissau to review the Government's performance under the Fund's emergency post-conflict assistance programme and to discuss a second allotment of $2.8 million under the programme. The IMF mission

reached an agreement with the Government to consolidate recent gains made on fiscal stability throughout 2008 and to avoid the accumulation of new arrears through stricter budgetary controls and stepped-up efforts to increase revenue collection, as well as good economic governance. The Executive Board of IMF is expected to discuss the request for the disbursement of the second allotment by August 2008. The visiting IMF mission was confident that the current efforts of the Government will pave the way for a poverty reduction growth facility arrangement when Guinea-Bissau reaches the completion point under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries programme and for debt relief under the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative. IMF asserted that that series of economic governance initiatives would act as a catalyst for additional donor support for critical structural macroeconomic reforms. The Fund also proposed a follow-up to the November 2006 round-table meeting in Geneva to galvanize key donor partners of Guinea-Bissau with a view to their providing further support.

34. The World Food Programme continues to monitor food prices and has observed an increase of approximately 20 per cent in the price of rice in the past five months. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), rice imports are expected to reach 84,521 tons, while national production is estimated to reach 53,208 tons. So far, there is no evidence that the increase in food prices has had an impact on the nutritional status of children or the population in general, but the situation could easily deteriorate given that 14 per cent of rural households in the country are either moderately or severely food insecure. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), in collaboration with the nutrition department of the Ministry of Health and the non-governmental organization Caritas, has planned visits to the 24 nutritional centres in the country to collect data on the nutritional status of children.

35. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, supported by FAO, has launched a national agricultural diversification campaign to distribute seeds to rural farmers, including 65 tons of rice, 40 tons of peanuts and 9 tons of cowpeas. The national campaign is targeted particularly at producers affected by the low cashew crop yields in past years.

36. The United Nations joint team on AIDS is assisting the Government of Guinea-Bissau in creating the conditions necessary for receipt of the $44 million grant approved in November 2007 by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria in support of the country's fight against AIDS. In order to strengthen overall coordination, the United Nations country team provided technical support for the national system to monitor and evaluate the AIDS response, as well as for the procurement and supply management of AIDS-related commodities. The number of people undergoing antiretroviral treatment has increased from 860 adults and 39 children at the end of 2007 to 1,077 adults and 46 children in 2008.

37. On 29 April 2008, the Board of Executive Directors of the World Bank approved an International Development Association grant of $10 million to support an emergency public service delivery project in Guinea-Bissau. The grant will finance mainly the salaries of primary-schoolteachers, ensuring continued delivery of essential basic education services in 2008. It will also pave the way for broader-based support after 2008 through the multi-donor Education For All programme. Bearing in mind that salary arrears in the education sector caused several teacher

strikes last year, the World Bank remains engaged in contributing to the uninterrupted delivery of critical public services.

VII. Implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000)

38. From 14 to 16 April 2008, UNOGBIS facilitated the organization of a workshop on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security, which was attended by 30 participants from UNOGBIS, the United Nations country team, the European Commission, ECOWAS and the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding. The workshop provided an important forum to discuss strategies on how to enhance women's participation in peacebuilding in Guinea-Bissau. In this context, specific action points were delineated to introduce gender-specific elements into the strategic framework plan currently being prepared by the Peacebuilding Commission, the electoral process and the restructuring of the security and defence sector, as well as the process of national reconciliation. Furthermore, it was recommended that gender perspectives be integrated into all aspects of the work of the United Nations system in Guinea-Bissau. This also included proposals to set up a gender thematic working group in order to ensure coordination among United Nations and national stakeholders, including civil society, on the integration of a gender perspective in socio-political development programming in Guinea-Bissau.

39. During the reporting period UNOGBIS continued to work with the Institute for Women and Children, the main civil society network for women in Guinea-Bissau, which includes organizations of women parliamentarians and ministers, as well as institutions focusing on issues relating to gender-based violence and the integration of women in socio-economic development. A committee — established on 29 April 2008 — has agreed on a course of action to collect baseline information and conduct local consultations with women leaders, as well as Government and traditional community leaders. This process will culminate in the organization, in June 2008, of a national workshop with the objective of analysing the situation of men and women in the country and developing specific recommendations for the strategic framework plan for Guinea-Bissau of the Peacebuilding Commission.

VIII. Human rights aspects

40. On 29 April 2008, the Chairman of the Guinea-Bissau Human Rights League, Luis Vaz Martins, presented to my Representative the annual report of the League, which described with concern what the League saw as an increased trend towards the intimidation of journalists, magistrates and human rights activists, as well as the rising influence of the armed forces in political and State affairs. The report denounced the alleged increase in ethnocentrism and tribalism in the country and appealed for ethnic and religious balance in the composition of the armed forces.

41. On 3 May 2008, the Guinea-Bissau Journalists Observatory was launched with the aim of monitoring the situation of the media in the country. On 20 May, Alberto Dabó, a Reuters correspondent in Guinea-Bissau, appeared in court to face charges of libel arising from his participation as an interpreter in a British television news programme in June 2007, in which the navy of Guinea-Bissau was referred to as

being involved in drug trafficking activities. UNOGBIS will continue to monitor the progress of the case.

42. Child trafficking remains an issue of major concern. As many as 200 children, some as young as five years of age, are reportedly smuggled across the border to Senegal every month. Border police, key child-protection organizations and community leaders are being trained, with support from UNICEF, on specific tools to prevent such trafficking. UNICEF will also provide police focal points for child protection with equipment to facilitate surveillance along the borders. Relations between international and local child rights defenders and the Islamic Council of Guinea-Bissau are tense. The latter disagrees with the use of the term "trafficking", arguing that the travel of *talibé* children to Senegal occurs on religious grounds.

43. UNICEF and the United Nations Population Fund have agreed on joint programmes to accelerate efforts to end female genital mutilation in Guinea-Bissau, a practice which reportedly affects two out of five women aged between 15 and 49. With the support of United Nations agencies and civil society organizations, the special commission for women and children of the National Assembly has submitted a draft bill to ban the practice, although the President of the parliamentary commission for women and children's issues recently decided to remove the item from the agenda of the National Assembly on the grounds that it would exacerbate ethnic and religious tensions.

IX. Staff security

44. The security situation during the reporting period was affected by the political instability and the presence of armed groups involved in robbing entire villages. Paradoxically, the crime rate remains low. United Nations and other international staff have mainly been victims of petty theft and non-violent attempts to break into their houses. One robbery and one break-in attempt were reported during the period. United Nations staff can circulate freely throughout the country.

X. Observations and recommendations

45. The recent disclosure by the authorities in Guinea-Bissau of knowledge of those individuals involved in drug trafficking and organized crime underscores the urgent need for the international community to take strong action in support of the Government in the fight against drug trafficking and organized crime. I urge the authorities of Guinea-Bissau to take advantage of international instruments to tackle this phenomenon, which has regional and international implications.

46. I am encouraged by reports of improved prospects for economic recovery and by the determination of the Government of Guinea-Bissau to take strong measures aimed at improving fiscal discipline and economic stability in the country. However, the economic and financial situation remains dire, calling for substantial support by the international community if Guinea-Bissau is to emerge from its present predicament, particularly the continuing budget deficits and the absence of State investment in public services and infrastructure.

47. It is especially worrying that, as Guinea-Bissau prepares for legislative elections in November 2008 and at a time when the overall situation in the country

remains volatile, the necessary financial resources for the smooth conduct of those crucial polls have not been found. The recent clashes between the security forces and the perception of impunity undermine the gains made in advancing the rule of law and the democratic process. The Government's inability to pay salary arrears for the past few months could heighten tensions. In this connection, I renew my appeal to the international community to provide budgetary assistance to Guinea-Bissau and, in particular, to provide financial and material support for the forthcoming legislative elections. I applaud the efforts of international financial institutions to remain engaged with the country and, in particular, to continue to provide vital assistance.

48. I am encouraged by the surge in activities in the sphere of security sector reform in Guinea-Bissau and note with satisfaction the successful conclusion of the UNDP-financed census of the armed forces and the collaboration of the authorities of Guinea-Bissau in that exercise. With the successful completion of the census, a major obstacle to donor support for security sector reform has been overcome. I welcome the start of the European Security and Defence Policy mission in Guinea-Bissau, and the financial and technical support for the security sector reform programme in the country provided by the European Union.

49. I commend the Government for its consistent and constructive collaboration with the Peacebuilding Commission and call on the Government to continue to ensure sustained engagement at both the technical and the political levels. The success of the peacebuilding process is vital for the future of Guinea-Bissau, and I recommend the strengthening of the resources and capacity of UNOGBIS and the United Nations country team to enable them to support the process fully and effectively, especially given the additional workload that comes with the peacebuilding engagement.

50. I should like to conclude by commending once again the staff of UNOGBIS, under the leadership of my Representative, Shola Omoregie, as well as the personnel of the entire United Nations country team, for the important work they continue to carry out in Guinea-Bissau, often under challenging circumstances.